

Generous George

By Earl Derr Biggers

Illustrated by John Gruelle



"She Was Emphasizin' Her Words by Warin' a Umbrella Vigorously."

GENEROSITY," said Mr. Peter Powers, leaning toward me in the silence of the rathskeller, "is your strong point, and that's how you come to remind me o' George Barber. George was the most generous man I ever see, though you're a close second, and who knows but you'll beat him out in the end? Yes, thanks—I will. You're very kind. But George, he was a wonder. Every payday he acted more and more like Carnegie, only he never wasted no money on libraries. It was a real pleasure to sit near him in a cafe, with a good spry waiter close at hand. Yes, sir, you remind me o' George in a good many ways. He didn't have a very intelligent face, but he knew enough not to have heart failure whenever the waiter brought the checks." He imbibed.

"It's long since I seen poor George," he went on feelingly. "Three long years since the time him an' me tried to get rid o' a thousand sewin'-machines that had come into our lives accidental like. Unusual machines they was, too, always causin' trouble, an' before we got 'em off our hands we'd kidnapped half the female population o' a little New England town. Mebbe you'd like to hear about it?"

I consulted my pocket, and again nodded to

the waiter. With this slight encouragement Mr. Powers began:

On one of the big North River docks in New York I struck old George Barber, always so jolly an' gay; an' the look in his eyes was sad an' his smile o' greeting was the kind that does service at funerals.

"I'm in trouble, Peter," he says to me low an' tearful.

"I'm sorry, George," says I, with the true ring in my voice, for I thought he was broke, and to meet the most generous man you know and find he has no money is the most mutual sorrow there is.

"See that fancy yacht," he says, pointin' to the harbor. And there, right in among the dirty tugs and tramp steamers and the like, was the prettiest little boat afloat. Her brasses an' awnings flashed in the sun, an' she was puffing an' snorting an' turning up her nose at the craft around her for all the world like Mrs. Van Dusen visiting the poorhouse.

"Ain't she the beauty?" I remarks.

George sighed. "I'm in command," he says.

I STARTED to congratulate him, but he got behind the post he had been leaning against, and held up his hand.

"Don't," says he. "That would be the last straw. On board that there yacht is the cause o'

all my worry. Peter Powers, if you'd told me when last we met that my generosity an' kind nature was goin' to get me in all this trouble I'd a turned different on the spot."

"I'm glad I didn't then," I says heartily.

"Yes," he answers, "I suppose it was better to let me live in ignorance, but it was a awful blow when it fell." He leans toward me. "Come on board," he whispers, like the villain in the show, "We might be heard here. Come an' I'll tell you the story o' my life."

WE was rowed out to the yacht, an' once in the cabin, I was pleased to see that George was himself again, fer I had only just set down when he put some bottles an' glasses on the table. That was George—that was the secret o' his generosity. The trouble he was in, the story he had to tell—or the one someone else was tellin'—never got him so interested he fergot the liquid refreshment. Well, we set down, an' George took up his sad, sad story.

"Six months ago," he says, "I was a happy man—first mate of a tramp steamer carryin' bananas between a lot o' little South American republics an' New York. Then one day a rich general down there in the tropic climes got the idee that he ought to be president o' the pink spot on the map called his country. He an' our captain met; money talked, as is its habit; an'



"They Nixer Stopped,
He Said Softly."

when next we left New York it was with ten thousand rifles stowed away below, in the name o' Liberty as represented by the general. Everything had been arranged by his agents; all we did was to take the boxes from a shady wharf on a dark night an' hide 'em away from anxious eyes. So we steamed south, to aid and abet a Humpty Dumpty president at havin' a great fall.

"But he didn't. Oh, it's a sad tale. We anchored two miles up a forsaken, smelly river one moonlight night, an' saw the ragged army o' tyrant stanglers camped on the shore. The general lent talk to the unloading—he was a fat man full o' whiskey an' excitement. When the boxes was all ashore he grabbed an ax an' mounted one o' them. Downin' tyrants was his subject; that an' givin' Liberty a fair field. Also he mentioned that he had waited long fer them rifles. A fuzzy atmosphere was crawlin' into our lungs and choking us, so we told him to cut it short. Then he opened a box, an' next he swore—in Spanish."

"Well, Peter, there ain't no use makin a mystery o' it. Inside that box was a neat little sewin' machine. Inside the next ten, twenty, thirty up to one thousand boxes the general began openin' they was sewin'-machines. Don't ask me how they got there—I don't know. The general sat down on a box and cried, an' between sobs he asked us what we thought he was runnin'—a sewin'-circle or a war. Our captain tried to tell him they was a new kind o' machine gun, but the old boy wouldn't be cheered."

"This ain't no woman's war," he says.

"Well," says Murry, the captain, "it was pretty dark that night on the wharf. An' these

look a lot like the boxes we was told to take on. They was a few more than we expected, but we thought you couldn't have too many—er—rifles."

"At mention o' that word the general stood up an' drew on his vocabulary fer some o' the choicest words I ever hear used. Then he set down an' cried some more."

"You fight too much in these blame picture-book countries, anyhow," says Murry, mad about the names. "Sometime when I can afford it I'm goin' to take a day off an' spank this seat of war. It's muddy hee," he goes on, "an' I don't like the cries of the birds an' beasts, nor the wild, wet breeze comin' up from the swamp. I believe I'm catchin' cold. I'm goin' back on board."

"The general grabs him. 'The rifles?' he inquires."

"I'm sorry," says Murry, who'd got most of his pay for the job before startin' in, "I'm very sorry, but someone else probably has 'em now. An' it wouldn't be safe to inquire."

"Keep the machines," he says, "they'll come in handy round the camp. Rainy days when it's too wet to fight let the men stay at home an' do a little dress-makin'. They need new clothes," he says.

"Two minutes thinkin' convinced the general that revolutions were too expensive just then, an' that he'd better wait till they was cheaper. He tells his army to go home an' forget it, in a sort of a mushy speech. We took him an' the machines to the capital city, where he got back his job o' Secretary of War, with no questions asked. He's there now, quietly waitin' fer a chance to shoot the president under the table at a cabinet meeting."

THAT, 'sir, is the story George had to tell, an' as he stopped to fill my glass I says to him: "George," I says, "what has all this to do with you an' your trouble?"

"My trouble," says George, "is that I'm too generous. Them sewin'-machines—a thousand of 'em—are on board this yacht. In a evil minute, urged on by my kindness o' heart an' a offer of a third what I get fer 'em, I agreed to come up here in the general's yacht an' sell 'em off fer him."

"Well, why don't you?" I says.

"Why don't I?" answers George, with tears in his eyes. "That's it, why don't I? A thousand white elephants on board this yacht would be easier disposed of. A thousand diamond tiaras disappearin' from a New York wharf wouldn't have caused more stir among the police. The government has taken charge of the rifles, an' now they're lookin' fer the machines. They want

everything. As sure as I steal into a city an' get ready fer bargain day on the yacht, the newspapers come out with big headlines about new clues in the case. Why don't they fergit it? Ain't there no other news but lost sewin'-machines?"

"The thing to do," I says, slow an' careful, "is to go somewhere an' sell them machines to somebody."

George looks disappointed. "I'd got that far myself," he says.

"Yes," I says, "but you ain't been usin' common sense in carryin' out the plan. You've been tryin' to sell what I suppose a cruel justice calls stolen goods in the land o' arc lights an' cafes, where crime is wrote large in the headlines, an' there's suspicion in the eye of your brother if you ask him the time. It's the simple life fer yours. It's some little village alone an' forgotten by the sea, where hearts is unsuspecting, an' manners an' customs—especially customs—ain't too exactin'."

"You're right, Peter," says George, "you're right."

OF course I am," says I, "an' I know the place, to. Up on the Maine coast they's a little town called Grimport that even the Lord thinks has toppled off into the sea. What ails you, George?"

"I've heard of it," says George, choking over his drink.

"That's queer," says I. "I didn't suppose any man on earth had heard of it but me."

"A—friend—of mine onct lived there," says George.

"No friend o' mine has lived there, or ever could, an' still be a friend," I says. "But here's my plan. Why not run up there fer one day, pass round bills in the mornin' invitin' all ladies to come on board in the afternoon an' view the machines we're almost givin' away, sell all we can, deliver 'em an' collect the money, an' then flit away before suspicion wakes? I'll go with you, George. I'm out of a berth, an' I always did like to be near you, anyhow."

George's gratitude at my offering to go along was touchin' to see, an' he hunts up the crew, orderin' them to start at once. We steamed away north, an' all that night George sat up in the cabin, deaf to the swearin' of the mate, writin' advertisements of sewin'-machines that was artistic triumphs. He said the machines was bought by a missionary society for the heathen in Africa, but when they was delivered the heathen wouldn't have them, because they didn't like to sew, and didn't wear clothes, anyhow.

One o' the crew that was onct a sign painter in San Francisco printed George's ads on ten big boards' an' the morning we got to Grimport we took 'em ashore an' put 'em up where they couldn't help bein' seen. I tried to get George to tie up to the docks, but he was set on anchorin' out in the harbor. We could get under way



JOHN
GRUELLE

"Be Calm, Ladies, Be Calm," Says George. "This Is an Accident, and We're All Sorry, I'm Sure."



"Then He Opened a Box an' Next He Swore—in Spanish."

quicker if anything happened, he said, an' he was so afraid of trouble that he went ashore an' hired a waterman to carry the ladies to and from the yacht, not wantin' to use our own boat fer the purpose.

At one o'clock that afternoon we set down to wait fer customers. George was a little nervous about the outcome of the plan, so I cheers him up a bit.

"Think o' it," I says. "In this deserted village there's over a thousand women heartsick and hungerin' fer a bargain sale. Few, if any, have come into their lives. An' now we bring 'em their heart's desire on board a yacht. Why, George, they'll flock here like—like birds. We'll be hailed as public benefactors. They'll build us a statue at the mouth of this harbor."

"Under water," growls George.
"You wait an' see," I tells him.

GEORGE waited and he saw. I wish I could describe the scene that followed. If I had one more drink mebbe I could. Thank you—much obliged. The first trip the waterman made he brought five women, an' pretty soon lady shoppers was thicker on that deck than in a department store the day before Christmas. George got out some of the machines, an' some of the ladies who had brought along implements fer sewing set down and sewed, accordin' to George's offer in the ads. You won't guess what a pretty scene it made, with the ladies talkin' a blue streak and the machines a-buzzin', an' George's head buzzin' too, because of the questions they asked.

One by one they came an' ordered an' went away. I could hear George sayin': "Yes'm, pay on delivery tonight," an' then he'd come over to where I was sittin' by the rail and punch me like he was ringin' up the sale on a cash register, an' shriek low fer joy. "Another gone," he'd say, "Peter, this is your work, God bless you!"

It began to get late, an' the crowd thinned out. They was just five left, a aged lady with green specs, a old maid who wouldn't have been satisfied with a solid gold machine set with diamonds, a butcher's wife whose social standin' wouldn't allow her to buy nothin' inferior, an' two young married women who couldn't decide. George comes over to me.

"Two hundred an' eighty-three sold," he says. "If you'd a told me yesterday such luck was waitin' fer me, I'd a jammed the lie down your throat. Tonight I'll be a rich man. Two hundred an' eighty-three, and mebbe some more."

"Yes, mebbe some more," I says, "fer here comes the waterman with another customer."

GEORGE smiled an' says: "That's good." He turned to look at the waterman's skiff, not a hundred yards away. Then his face went white an' he trembled all over. At that minute the waterman's passenger, a tall, homely woman, stood up in the stern of the boat and made some remarks, emphasizin' her words by wavin' a umbrella vigorously.

"Good Lord," says George in a broken voice, "she's seen me."

"Well, why not?" says I, surprised.

"Why not?" shrieked George. "Why not, you fool? She's my wife, that's why not."

"You never told me," I says sadly.

"This ain' no time fer family history," he says, an' rushes below. I followed. The en-

gineer was right there, but George didn't notice him. He started the yacht himself.

"Look here," I hollered, "they's five women aboard this boat what belong ashore. Are you mad, George?"

"No," says George, "I'm doin' the only sane thing, as you'd know if you'd ever met my wife.

Eight years ago, I left her, an' she's been after me ever since. Once she gets me, I'm a goner. I was a fool fer comin' to this town; she used to live here when she was a girl. Go up on the bridge an' keep her headed to sea, Jim," he says to one o' the men.

"Where are we goin'?" I asks.

"Siberia, Hindoostan, Algiers, anywhere," says George. "Anywhere, I ain't sure where," he says. "I only know we're goin' an' we're goin' quick."

"Well, put on your armor," I says, "an' we'll go up on deck."

I THINK I'll need another drink to describe the scene that met our eyes there. Thanks. Have you ever faced five cryin'-mad women you've just kidnapped? No? Well, I guess they ain't no use tryin' to give you any idee o' the way they acted.

"Be calm, ladies, be calm," says George, in his softest tones. "This is a accident, an' we're all sorry, I'm sure."

The old lady with green specs stopped cryin' to scream:

"Pirates! Pirates! I knew it from the very first. It seemed all along something was wrong. I suppose we're bein' carried off to be pirates. But I won't be one. I'll die first!"

"Yes, I guess you will," says George, tryin' to cheer things up a bit.

"Listen to that," shrieked the old lady; "he's goin' to kill us! I knew it. Take us back, you monster!"

George tried to explain, but explainin' to angry women is like expostulatin' with a storm at sea. The names they called him wasn't exactly profane, but they sounded less polite, somehow.

When we'd gone about three miles down the coast I took George aside.

"Your wife can't follow you here," I says, "an' I can't listen to this commotion much longer an' stay in my right—(Continued on Page 17.)

mind. Why not stop an' put these women ashore in a boat? They can walk back to Grimport before night."

George said it was the best plan, an' he told the ladies so. As he was linin' 'em up ready to lower 'em in to the ship's boat, his generosity came to the front again.

"I've caused you some inconvenience, ladies," he says. "No, you can't deny it—don't try. So I'm goin' to make each o' you a nice little present. With each lady put ashore goes one o' our latest-model, light-runnin' sewin'-machines. When I'm far away—an' I'll be far away as I can get, you can bet on that," he says, thinkin' o' his wife, "you can look at the machines an' remember George Barber, the man that carried you away by accident—"

"Cut it out," says the butcher's wife. "It's gettin' late."

So the crew put 'em ashore in the boat, an' followed 'em with five o' our best machines. They made a pretty picture, standin' on the sand, each one beside a sewin'-machine, an' utterin' female curses on George's head. We steamed away, an' George said it almost broke his heart to leave 'em. But I reminded him o' his wife, an' he was comforted.

We'd gone about a quarter o' a mile when George came rushin' to me, a glass in his hand. "Peter," he says, "bad luck don't come single. They've got us now, or my name ain't George Barber."

"Who's got us," I asked, "the ladies?"

"The law," whispers George, in hoarse tones. An' he points with shakin' finger toward a revenue cutter speedin' along through the dusk, blowin' bushels o' smoke from its funnels, an' throwin' its searchlight, like some evil eye, over the waters.

"It's been nothin' but trouble, trouble," says George sadly, "ever since I took charge o' these blamed machines. An' now it's six years hard labor fer us all." He fell over a machine an' instead o' swearin' stops to think. "They's one way out," he says, excited like. "They's one way to save us yet."

An' he picks up a machine an' throws it overboard. "Call the crew," he shouts. "This is the only way." We all got to work, not relishin' George's picture o' prison stripes, an' pretty soon we'd thrown nine hundred and ninety-five perfectly good machines into the deep blue sea.

THE cutter comes nearer an' nearer. George finds it harder an' harder to breathe. Then she turns her light on us fer a second—just a contemptuous glance in passin'—an' flashes by.

George's face was a sight to see, even in the dusk.

"They never stopped," he says softly.

"That's clear," says I. "They went right by."

"Fifty thousand dollars worth o' sewin' machines," he murmurs, "thrown to the mermaids."

"It's a shame," says I. "But the mermaids need—"

"A third o' the money mine," he goes on, "an' a excitable general waitin' in South America fer his share of the proceeds."

"What's the answer?" I says.

We steamed on southward, a sad lot. I asked to be put ashore here at New York, an' George gave in, against his will. When I said good-bye, he told me his plan. He was goin' to show the general the newspaper clippings of how the police was on our track.

THE story of our brave fight, as I have thought it out," says George, "is a touchin' one. For a hundred miles we raced the fastest revenue cutter in America. Brought to bay at last, we were forced to throw overboard our treasure, in order to save our lives. All is lost, my dear general, save honor and the yacht."

"I hope he'll be good to you," I says, "as good as you deserve. Good-bye. Good-bye, George. I hate to leave you."

"And so," finished Mr. Peter Powers, "me and George Barber parted for the last time. It's been three long years since I seen him, and him the most generous man I know. No, you haven't beat him out; I'd like to say you had, but loyalty to poor old George won't let me."

I said good-bye to poor old George's faithful friend, and started out. Near the door I met a waiter I knew.

"Who is this Peter Powers?" I asked.

The waiter smiled. "He's a carpenter," he said, "and he lives over in Jersey."

"But he's been on the water a great deal," I protested.

"Ferry boats," returned the man. "Twice a day—morning and night. And maybe on the swan boats in Central Park."